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THE FRIENDS OF GUATEMALA

During the latter part of 1953 and the first two months of this year, groups were formed in Brazil, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Chile, Cuba and Bolivia --- all disciplined --- all organized for the purpose of "expressing friendship for Guatemala."

Who are the men who make up the "friendship societies"? What are the real aims of these "spontaneous" groups? How did they come into being? These are the questions being asked throughout the Western Hemisphere by those who are aware of the political nature of the Guatemalan government.

The story begins in late 1953 when Latin Americans became increasingly aware of Communist infiltration in Guatemala and many of the Latin American writers began to call the attention of their readers to the possible dangers of a Communist base in the Western Hemisphere. To the propagandists in the Kremlin, this unwanted attention presented a problem which had to be countered. During this period, a Brazilian, Alfredo Diaz Gomez, happened to be in Moscow. He was the lawyer for the Brazil-Soviet Institute and particularly qualified to aid the "cause" in Brazil.

Senior Gomez returned quietly to Brazil and in October, 1953, a Brazil-Guatemala Cultural Institute was formed in Rio de Janeiro. This was strange in a country having little political or economic intercourse with Guatemala. But stranger still was that there were no Guatemalans associated with the institute and that among the founders were Enrique Fialho who had also recently returned from a trip to Moscow, Warsaw and Prague and his wife, a "Stalin Prize" winner, and just returned from a trip to Guatemala where she had been wined and dined by the top Communists in that nation.

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The Institute began to grind out propaganda which looked very much like that of the Brazil-Soviet Institute, but dedicated to praise of Guatemala rather than the USSR. All of its references to the United States were derogatory.

In Mexico, a very important and frequent visitor to Moscow, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, head of the Communist Latin American Confederation of Labor announced the formation of a "Society of Friends of Guatemala". This announcement was made in the Mexican press with great fanfare on the 18th of December 1953. The announcement contained several columns of names of people supposedly supporting the Society. Fully half of these names were dropped from the roster after the surprised readers threatened libel suits against the Society. Among these remaining were the President, Pedro de Alba, once Mexican Ambassador to Chile and long known as a Communist; Dr. Jorge Carrion, and overt member of the Mexican Communist Party; and another Iron Curtain traveler and "pro-peace" activists, Fernando Benitez. All the society's propaganda contains love for Guatemala and hate for the imperialist "Yankees".

But the above apparently did not satisfy Moscow's desires, because, through sources in Guatemala, it has been reliably reported that Manuel Fortuny, on his return from Moscow, paid a visit to Vicente Lombardo Toledano in Mexico and expressed his and Moscow's worry over news stories decrying Communist influence in Guatemala, and the possible results of such stories on delegates to the Caracas Conference of American states. On the 22nd of January, Senor Toledano sent cables to all the top Communist leaders throughout the Western Hemisphere.

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A few days later Societies of "Friends of Guatemala" were formed in Bolivia, Chile and Panama. Among the founders of these groups were: Bolivia --- Jose Artonio Arse and Luis Soria, both top Communist leaders; Chile --- Baltazar Castro, president of the Chilean Chamber of Deputies recently returned from Moscow, and Enrique Kirberg, member of the Communist Party's Central Committee; Panama --- Hugo Victor, president of the Panamanian Communist Party in 1952.

In Bolivia, the Confederation of Teachers, previously condemned by the Bolivian Catholic Church as an instrumentality of Communism, was honored by the ex-president of Guatemala, Juan Jose Arevalo, as principal speaker at a rally.

All of the above societies pumped the same line: "Guatemala is a wonderful place for workers and the United States is an imperialist monster. Pity Guatemala who stands 'alone'".

In the latter part of February, a long list of known Cuban Communists including one of their top Moscow hatchet men, Juan Marinello, created another "friendship society" - which praised you-know-who and damned the U.S. And when the Caracas Conference took place, still another "friendly group" was created in Bogota, Colombia, by "coincidence", also composed of known Communists.

As the Caracas Conference proceeded and the position of Communism became more precarious, the various "friendship" societies increased their propaganda output to hysterical intensity, expressing pity for "lonely" Guatemala and hatred for the United States. They were unsuccessful and most of the Latin American governments condemned Communist intervention in the Western Hemisphere.

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After the Caracas Conference there was a strange silence which lasted throughout the months of April and May; however, toward the end of April, as conditions grew worse in Guatemala and the Guatemalan Government prepared to take harsher totalitarian measures, Radio Moscow finally revealed its hand in a series of broadcasts to Latin America and commended Guatemala, sympathized with it in its "lone" struggle against U.S. imperialism, and stated that the people of Latin America are behind Guatemala, and cited the formation of "Societies of Friends of Guatemala" as proof.

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Although as indicated, the different societies of Friends of Guatemala have been relatively quiescent throughout the last two months, due to their international Communist origin, as the opposition pressures have build up against the Communist Guatemalan regime, the societies have once again begun their disciplined propaganda expressing love and sympathy for "lonely" Guatemala and hatred for the United States.

Even as this is being written, a recrudescence of this is seen in the Sidney Gruson story on page 7 of today's (June 14) New York Times where it is stated that the Guatemalan Embassy in Mexico City has released a message of support and sympathy to the Guatemalan Government in the form of a statement made by General Cárdenas. The Gruson piece states that the message was released a day after the publication by "The Society of Friends of Guatemala", of large newspaper advertisements calling on Mexico and the Mexicans to stand at the side of Guatemala in her dispute with the U.S. over the rise of Communist influence in the republic.

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